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APRIL - JUNE 2018

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SHOWING UP
THE YOUNG 'UNS

Q&A
WITH EDGAR PANGELINAN

VICKIE IZUKA
STEPS UP TO THE PLATE

WHIP UP
A TURKEY-KALE-BASIL-PESTO PASTA

BOYS OF TANAPAG

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A STORY THAT MAKES YOU GO 'WOW'...

The story of Doris Rangamar is one for the books. A wife, mother, and grandmother, Rangamar won gold in the discus throw event at the 2014 Micronesian Games. Rangamar was already in her late 40s and already a grandmother then. Notably, she won that event against her own daughter, who was in high school at that time. Rangamar ruled the same event in 2002, when she set the record for discus throw at the Micro Games. A record that still stands today.

...THAT PROVOKES

Something mysterious seems to be happening in Tanapag. Is it the PCB-infused soil? The water they drink? Whatever the case may be, Tanapag has produced many excellent baseball players. In fact, many of the youths from that village now suit up for other teams on Saipan. In this issue, **Jon Perez**'s article takes a quick look at the many outstanding players emanating from the village.

...THAT MAKES YOU COOK

Pesto, that green-colored sauce that makes for an excellent pasta dish, gets a makeover in the creative hands of **Mami Ikeda**, this time with kale, roasted turkey, and basil. Get crackin' in the kitchen with this Instagram-ready dish!

...THAT INSPIRES

Vickie Izuka may have known next-to-nothing about soccer back in early 2000s but that's no longer the case. As vice president of the Northern Mariana Islands Football Association, Izuka, much like the organization, has evolved and, as told in an article by **Roselyn Monroyo**, has become a point person in the development of the sport in the CNMI.

...THAT AMAZES

The same holds true in **Mark Rabago**'s question-and-answer feature on basketball player Edgar Pangelinan. Despite being faced with multiple health issues that could have sidelined him, he remains not far from the sport he loves, as assistant coach in the Rollers Basketball Program.

...THAT MAKES YOU GO, HMMM...

The equation WE>1 is not just a mathematical construct; it stands for the motto of the 670 Sonics Basketball Club. Much like the American motto, "e pluribus unum" (out of many, one), the Sonics' motto says, "We are greater than one."

WANT TO GET SOMETHING OFF YOUR CHEST?

So you have a beef with something. Want to get it off your chest? For questions, criticisms, letters to the editor, and suggestions, email them to editor@saipantribune.com.

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
Managing Editor

COVER ART

Jester Kintaro of the Falcons celebrates after making the winning play in their team's victory over the Fielders in the 2015 Junior League division finals of the Saipan Little League.

Photography by
JON PEREZ

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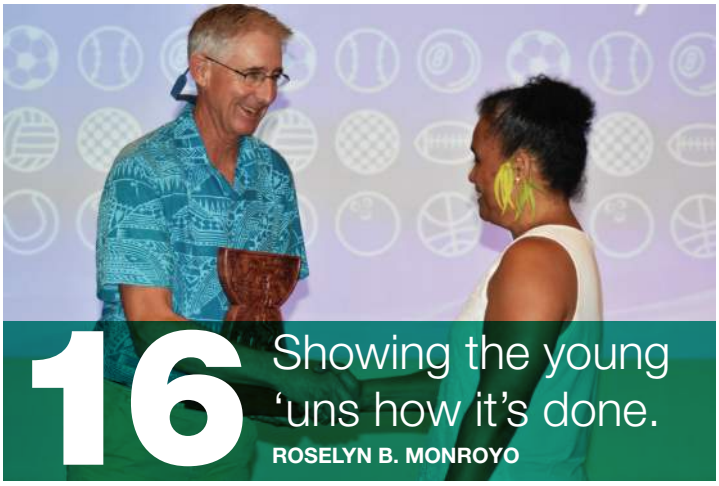
APRIL - JUNE 2018

scoreboard



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MAMI IKEDA

Mami considers herself the daughter of the Koto Restaurant that was ran by her late parents in Susupe back in late '70s to early '80s. A member of disaster relief team C.O.R.E. and the Commonwealth Racing Federation and an advocate for the Commonwealth Cancer Association, Mami loves being a crazy cat mom and herb gardening. To reach her, email mami96950@gmail.com.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Once Roselyn hangs up her sportswriting gloves, she still wants to get involved in sports but in the capacity of an official. For now, Michael White's position at NMSA is safe (lol!) because Roselyn is still having a blast covering games. To reach her, email Roselyn at roselyn_monroyo@saipantribune.com.

JON PEREZ

Francisco M. Palacios, Tony Rogolifoi, and the late Roque Celis helped Jon to learn more about baseball—terms and reading the score sheets—when he first arrived on Saipan almost 15 years ago. To reach him, email Jon at jon_perez@saipantribune.com.

MARK A. RABAGO

Mark once made 10 triples in a basketball game. Now, the only triples he makes are the triple-decked pancakes he cooks for his two lovely daughters.
To reach him, email Mark at mark_rabago@saipantribune.com.

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TURKEY KALE-BASIL Pesto Pasta

MAMIIKEDA
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

Kale is known for its amazing nutritious benefits that don't break even if it's baked into chips. I started replacing romaine and spinach (which are costly here on island) with kale when Joeten started selling them at a more affordable price (now I grow my own kale, along with basil, which are really easy). This pesto is one of them, simply replacing half the amount of basil of a regular pesto recipe with kale. You can use nuts of your choice too (other bests would be traditional pine nuts and walnuts), but cashew is my favorite. There's also my vegan variation of this recipe at the end. Enjoy various combinations and happy cooking! This recipe makes for servings.

INGREDIENTS

2 slices, diced roasted turkey
400 grams angel hair pasta (preferably whole grain)
2-3 stems kale
2 stalks fresh basil
1/4 cup roasted cashew nuts
2-3 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 pinch sea salt
1 pinch black pepper

Make pesto: Dump kale and basil into a Nutribullet container (or any food processor) together with cashews, garlic, Parmesan, olive oil, salt, and pepper.

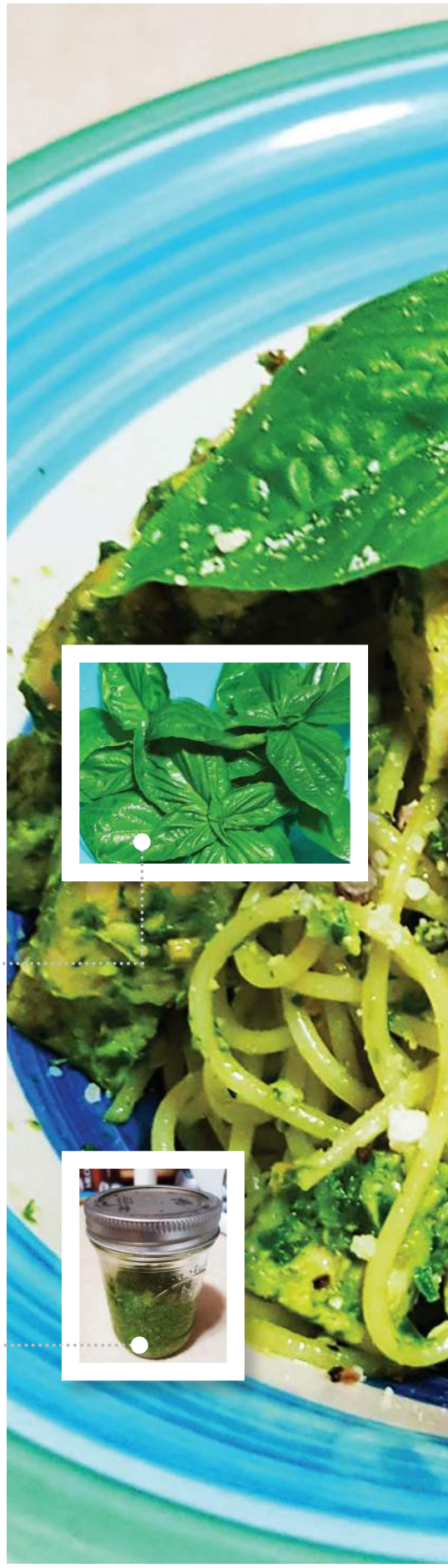
Cook the angel hair (or any pasta of your choice) *al dente*. After draining all the water from the pot, add diced turkey and pesto. Garnish with fresh basil leaves to serve.

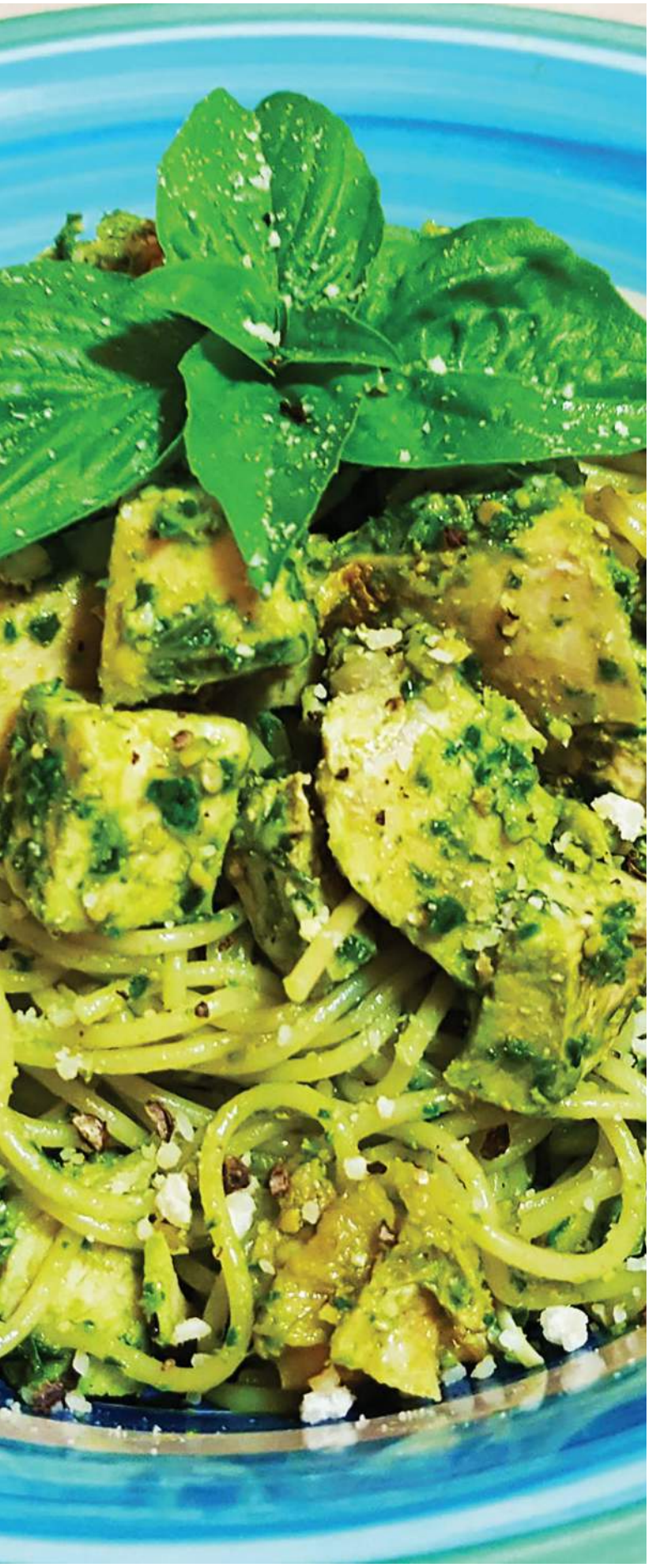
Tips: If you have any leftover pesto, keep it in the fridge in a glass container. Good for a week!

Healthier variation: Replace Parmesan and olive oil with 1/4 box of tofu for a creamy vegan pesto! To prep tofu for this recipe, wrap tofu in paper towels, place a plate on top, and leave it for 10-15 minutes to drain its water, so that the pesto won't be watery.

WHERE TO GET

- **Roasted turkey:** CHCC Cafeteria (Wednesdays only)
- **Kale and basil:** Joeten. If you're planning to grow them yourself, seeds are available at the Ace Hardware.





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Running for one's health

Nobody was more surprised than Rommel Buenaflor himself when he won his age group in the 2018 Saipan Marathon.

He wasn't expecting to place. At all.

His goal was just to improve on his previous time in the 42-kilometer event, so actually placing first in his age group was an unexpected bonus.

"I knew I had a lot of competition in my category. My target when I registered for the 42K distance was just to improve on my past record," he told TAGA *Sports*.

His success in the most recent Saipan Marathon is just a culmination of a journey that started a few years back when Buenaflor chose running as a hobby.

"I just wanted to lose weight and I could not even run a mile straight. However, after that I got hooked," he said.

By slow turns, this 41-year-old native of Ligao City, Albay in the Philippines came to adopt "health is wealth" as his personal mantra. His typical week starts with short runs of 5 kilometers from Monday to Thursday and these include a mix of tempo runs and hill work in what is termed as "fartlek" workouts. The latter is a training method that blends continuous training with interval training.

Long runs of 30 kilometers or more are reserved for Saturdays before relaxing a bit with easy recovery runs on Sundays, according to Buenaflor, who lives on Saipan with his wife Felma and their son Toby.

"Rest on Monday and Friday. Rest days are very important," he stressed.

Buenaflor prefers running in the morning than in the evening. "It is nice to start your day with exercise. While running in the morning, you can plan out your activities for the day," he said.

His favorite places to run are the Beach Road Pathway, the north side of Saipan (from Mariana Resort & Spa to Banzai, Bird Island and Suicide Cliff), and Isa Drive. For uphill workouts, he jogs up Mount Tapochao.

To gear up for any run, Buenaflor eats a high-carb meal the night before.

If it's a run of more than two hours, he makes sure to eat a peanut butter sandwich and a banana two hours before the run.

He spoils himself a bit after a run by occasionally enjoying banana and blueberry smoothies.

Aside from the typical euphoria that running enthusiasts usually experience, called a runner's high, Buenaflor took up the sport to simply just get healthy.

"There are a lot of benefits in running, like improved health, weight loss, boosting your confidence, relieving stress, eliminating depression, and preventing diseases. I consider it also as my 'me time,' my time to reflect and [pray]," he said.

Buenaflor believes it goes beyond the physical side, too. "It goes without saying that running trains the body, but running also trains the mind and can teach you a lot about yourself. Running has helped me to become more mentally tough," he said.

With the Saipan Marathon in his rearview mirror, there are still a lot of races Buenaflor would like to join in the future. He lists the Mayon 360 Ultramarathon in his home province of Albay, where you run 80 kilometers around the Mayon Volcano; and the Tarawera 100-mile Ultramarathon in New Zealand, on his bucket list.

Buenaflor advises novice runners to be patient and start slow.

"Run slow and short distances first. Build mileage gradually. Invest in a right pair of shoes and monitor the mileage of your shoes to avoid injuries. Track your runs so that you can see your progress. And always remember 'What seems hard now will one day be your warm-up,' which has become my favorite quote." TS

Fartlek, which means "speed play" in Swedish, is a training method that blends continuous training with interval training. **Fartlek** runs are a very simple form of a long distance run. **Fartlek** training "is simply defined as periods of fast running intermixed with periods of slower running.

—Wikipedia

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Rommel Buenaflor counts winning first place in his age group in the 2018 Saipan Marathon as one of his accomplishments.

DING RAMOS

EDGAR PANGELINAN

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Edgar Pangelinan, center, is flanked by two other basketball players in one of his previous games.

Cager Edgar Pangelinan has long been a feared scorer in local basketball leagues.

In his prime, the 5'8" swingman was strong enough to take his defender off the dribble and possessed a deadly outside shot—a lethal offensive combination that allowed the former Marianas High School Dolphin to lead the government league in scoring a couple of times (30.2 points per game in 2006 and 37.9 points per game in 2008).

Now 44 years old and a supervisor at the Bureau of Motor Vehicle, Pangelinan may have slowed down a bit in the last few years but this hasn't prevented him from enjoying the sport he loves. He recently sat down with TAGA *Sports* to recount his basketball odyssey, one he continues to track through sickness and in health.

How do you manage to still play sports in competitive leagues despite your medical condition?

By having faith, confidence, and being positive regardless of my condition. Managing is hard at times but I keep my head high and stay focused.

What is currently the state of your health and what are you doing to improve it?

I travel every six months off-island for follow-ups due to several life-threatening health issues that must be monitored by my physicians. I have to maintain and continue my medications as prescribed by my physicians for life.

How did you get into basketball and what have you achieved playing the sport?

I got into basketball when I was in third grade here on Saipan while attending William S. Reyes Elementary School in the early 1980s. I then relocated to Guam and continued my education in Guam and also the sport of basketball. I then relocated to California where the sport became more interesting and intense, as I would beg my mom to join the basketball clinics and competition. I have achieved friendship and respect for the love of the game. My skills developed while attending basketball clinics and competitions.

Aside from hoops, what other sport are you into and what level of success have you achieved in them?

I love spearfishing, softball, bowling, volleyball, and hunting.

What are the sports you no longer play? How does this make you feel?

Because of my illness the sports I can no longer play are spearfishing, softball, and hunting.

What are your aspirations for the future?

My aspirations for my future are to help develop young and talented individuals to become better athletes and also to push for them to excel in their education. As of this time, I am also an assistant coach in the Rollers Basketball Program. It is a start for me, but my ambitions are to be more supportive of the young generation.

What is your advice to people battling heath issues who still want to play their favorite sports?

My advice to individuals battling their illness is to continue what they love to do. Live life to the fullest and not give up. Always have faith and confidence in what you do and you will succeed. TS

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

2018 SPORTS CALENDAR

APRIL

Rites of Passage 23: Beatdown: Trench Tech's first offering for 2018 features the title defense bid of Roman "Sonic Boom" Alvarez against Russia's Andrei "The Venus Project" Zaitse.

CNMI Junior Tennis Championships: The last tournament under the Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association's calendar of events for the 2017-2018 season before it selects the junior players that will represent the CNMI to a couple of off-island tournaments.

PSS High School Basketball Tournament: The bragging rights will be at stake in this short tournament for high school teams on island.

MAY

Northern Marianas ITF Juniors Championships: Players from around the world compete on Saipan for ITF Juniors world ranking points.

AFC Grassroots Football Day: The CNMI joins the 46 other member-countries of Asian Football Confederation in a morning of fun, soccer, and camaraderie among the future of the sport.

McDonalds/PSS Track and Field Championships: Elementary, middle, and high school students will flood the newly-resurfaced Oleai Sports Complex track oval to participate in running, jumping, and throwing events.

JUNE

Oceania Micronesian Regional Championships: The CNMI plays host to the Oceania Athletics Association-sanctioned competition with the local bets challenging athletes from Guam, FSM, Palau, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Kiribati.

CNMI District Tournament: Little League teams from Rota, Tinian, and Saipan fight for the right to represent the CNMI in the Asia Pacific/Middle East Regional Tournament.

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Aven Evangelista proudly poses with the individual medal he won in the Majors division.

JON PEREZ

JON PEREZ

The Taalabwogh Falcons players and coaches pose for a photo after placing third in the Majors division of Saipan Little League's 2015 season.

Maybe it's the water. Or probably the direction of the wind. Or the fumes exhaled by the earth in the area. Whatever it is, Tanapag, one of Saipan's northernmost villages, is known for producing outstanding ballplayers whose names and feats pepper local legend.

JONPEREZ
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Also called Talaabwogh in the Carolinian dialect, Tanapag is a closely-knit community that shares one passion—baseball—and has produced some of the CNMI's greatest players that, throughout the years, had won championships and individual awards in local leagues, and medals after representing the Commonwealth in regional tournaments.

Their teams had always been contenders in local leagues—from the Major, Junior, Senior, and the defunct Big league divisions under the Saipan Little League program to the open and youth divisions of the Saipan Baseball League.

A story about the Boys of Tanapag is no walk in the park. Naming all of them and writing about their exploits in just one sitting is not easy. Even Manny Evangelista, who grew up in the village and played for the baseball team, could only recall a few.

"There are a lot of names on my mind. Too many to mention and I'm worried that I might forget some names," said Evangelista, who now coaches teams in the Saipan Little League program and managed the CNMI team when Saipan hosted the Asia Pacific Junior League Regional Tournament in 2015.

"We have a lot of great players from fast pitch softball to baseball since the birth of both sports here on Saipan. Jose Magofna, who is affectionately known in Tanapag as Tan Ping Magofna, is one great baseball player that I continuously hear about from our elders. He was even mentioned in [Francisco] "Tan Ko" Palacios' baseball book." »

Teams from Tanapag had always been contenders in the local baseball scene. They would either win the title or would be playing in the finals while their players are always the batting and pitching leaders.

They are almost celebrities, with the public knowing their names, their exploits, their skills, and has watched their careers grow. They have cheered for them or, in some cases, heckled them in jest that is part of the sport.

Some of these players, most of whom are graduates of Saipan's Little League program, are either still playing for teams that are based in Tanapag or in other competing squads in the SLL or the Saipan Baseball League—the island's premier baseball league.

So, is there something special about the air that they breathe or the water that they drink in Tanapag? Evangelista could only smile and remember the names and faces of his neighbors and friends.

"The air that we breathe and the water that we drink are the same on Saipan. We just teach them the basics of baseball. The fundamentals and help them with the right tools. We watch these kids grow, we see their mistakes, and we help them correct it."

"We just love baseball and helping the kids learn the sport. We want to start them young and, at the same time, keep them off the streets," said Evangelista, whose kids had either played or are still playing for Tanapag.

He said that "Tan Ping" was among the first great player that landed on the history book of baseball in the CNMI.

Evangelista guided the Falcons to the 2015 junior division title, a feat that earned him the manager position of the CNMI All-Star Team. He is currently the manager of the Falcons in the Major, Junior, and Senior divisions of the Saipan Little League.

He was also among the eight players from Talaabwogh that were chosen as starters for the CNMI All-Star Big League Team in 1986, which is also one of his proudest moment as a baseball player.

Evangelista was also the CNMI manager that helped the team reach the 1998 Big League World Series after beating Guam in the regional tournament and was also the first CNMI manager that defeated Chinese-Taipei in the Majors division's 2014 Asia Pacific Regional Tournament.

The Tanapag Falcons, under his and Doru Camacho's guidance, also won the 2007 title when the SBL was still known as the Saipan Major League. The championship was dedicated to Army S/Sgt. Wilgene T. Lieto, who died while serving in Iraq in 2005.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Jester Kintaro waves the Talaabwogh Falcons flag as they celebrate their title win in the Junior League division of the 2016 Saipan Little League Baseball at the Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios Ballfield.

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JON PEREZ

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Doris Rangamar checks on the students' schedule in the running events of the 2013 McDonald's/PSS All Schools Track and Field Championships at the Oleai Sports Complex.

Showing the young 'uns how it's done

Doris Rangamar's induction into the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame this year should be enough reason for her to stick to retirement.

But competitions beckon for the veteran athlete, especially now that the Oceania Micronesian Regional Championships and Micronesian Games are just around the corner.

ROSELYNMONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

"At this point, I feel that I have accomplished all that I can. But, if my health permits, I will come out of retirement because I love the sport and I like to compete and hope to motivate our new generation of athletes," said Rangamar, who has represented the CNMI in athletics competitions (field events) in the Micro Games and other regional events several times and won medals for the Commonwealth.

"I asked Eli, my husband, if I could compete in the regional championships or qualify for the CNMI team to the Micro Games. I'm going to work harder since everyone is getting stronger. I need to keep up with the young ones," she said after her induction into the elite group last February.

Rangamar has already proven she could keep up or even beat young athletes when she took the gold medal in the discus throw in the 2014 Micronesian Games in Pohnpei. Incidentally, she won the event against her daughter Lia, who was in high school then. Doris was in her late 40s and already a grandmother when she topped the discus throw in the Micro Games four years ago. She ruled the same event in 2002 after a 31.69-meter heave and her record in the quadrennial competition still stands today.

Rangamar attributed her competitive »

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Doris Rangamar, standing left, joins other members and coaches of the CNMI Athletics Team for a group photo at the Oleai Sports Complex track and field facility before they head to Pohnpei to compete in the 2014 Micronesian Games.

nature to her early involvement with sports and her family.

"Growing up, I'd see my sisters playing sports (fast pitch softball and track and field) and I would follow and root for them. Then in my elementary, junior, and high school days, I would join intramurals and interscholastic sports," Rangamar said.

"When coach Eli and I got married, he saw potential in me. He said I could be good in field events so he trained me, along with other athletes. From there, I excelled in the event and was surprised that I broke the record in the discus and medaled in other field events (javelin and shot put throws)," the mother of five said.

Rangamar said it's easier to love sports because her children are also into it. Leigh, Rachel, and Lia were into track, basketball, and volleyball during their elementary and high school days. Now Leigh occasionally plays indoor volleyball and slow pitch softball, while Lia returned to the island after graduating from college and has resumed playing basketball, hoping to make it to the Yap-bound national team. Rangamar's youngest daughter, Kina, and only son, Dereck, are also starting to get into the athletics program, having joined last year's All Schools meet and cross country series.

"I bring my children to the gym or track if they have game or practice and then I go out and play," Rangamar said.

She is happy to see her children playing, whether in a competitive or recreational setting and wishes to have more youth, especially women, getting involved in sports to take over from seasoned athletes like her and get better and more opportunities that sports has to offer.

Evidence has shown that young women and youth in general who participate in sports are more likely to attain educational success.

Quoting a report (Women in Sports) published by the Peterson Institute for International Economic in 2014, Rangamar said that girls who play sports do better in school, suffer fewer health problems, achieve more in areas dominated by men, and hold better jobs as adults.

GOLDEN FEATS

- **Gold medalist** (discus throw), 2014 Micronesian Games in Pohnpei
- **Silver medalist** (discus), **bronze medalist** (hammer throw), 2006 Micronesian Games on Saipan
- **Gold medalist** (javelin), **bronze medalist** (discus and shot put), 2005 Micronesian Area Championships on Saipan
- **Record holder and gold medalist** (discus), 2002 Micronesian Games in Pohnpei
- **CNMI Representative**, 2004 Oceania Area Championships in Australia
- **CNMI National Volleyball Team Member**, 1998 Micronesian Games in Palau
- **CNMI National Softball Team Member**, 1999 South Pacific Games in Guam

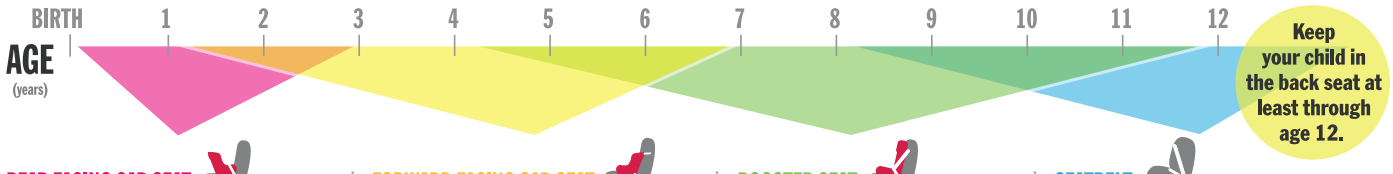
CLICK-IT OR TICKET

National Seat Belt Enforcement Mobilization

May 21 - June 03, 2018

Car Seat Recommendations for Children

- Select a car seat based on your child's age and size, and choose a seat that fits in your vehicle and use it every time.
- Always refer to your specific car seat manufacturer's instructions; read the vehicle owner's manual on how to install the car seat using the seat belt or LATCH system; and check height and weight limits.
- To maximize safety, keep your child in the car seat for as long as possible, as long as the child fits within the manufacturer's height and weight requirements.
- Keep your child in the back seat at least through age 12.



REAR-FACING CAR SEAT

Your child under age 1 should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. There are different types of rear-facing car seats: Infant-only seats can only be used rear-facing. Convertible and 3-in-1 car seats typically have higher height and weight limits for the rear-facing position, allowing you to keep your child rear-facing for a longer period of time.

FORWARD-FACING CAR SEAT

Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. It's the best way to keep him or her safe. Your child should remain in a rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness.

BOOSTER SEAT

Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it's time to travel in a booster seat, but still in the back seat.

SEATBELT

Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. For a seat belt to fit properly the lap belt must lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snug across the shoulder and chest and not cross the neck or face. Remember: your child should still ride in the back seat because it's safer there.

DESCRIPTION [RESTRAINT TYPE]

A **REAR-FACING CAR SEAT** is the best seat for your young child to use. It has a harness and in a crash, cradles and moves with your child to reduce the stress to the child's fragile neck and spinal cord.

A **FORWARD-FACING CAR SEAT** has a harness and tether that limits your child's forward movement during a crash.

A **BOOSTER SEAT** positions the seat belt so that it fits properly over the stronger parts of your child's body.

A **SEAT BELT** should lie across the upper thighs and be snug across the shoulder and chest to restrain the child safely in a crash. It should not rest on the stomach area or across the neck.

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COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS OFFICIAL SEAL

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

Nicole Tsong, right, works on Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu moves with opponent Morwenna Hardwick at Gracie Barra Seattle studio in Sodo.

STEVE RINGMAN/THE SEATTLE TIMES/TNS

BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU

PREPARE FOR HEADLOCKS, BEAR HUGS AND A WHOLE LOT OF GRAPPLING

NICOLETSONG
The Seattle Times

I was pinned under my partner, her weight planted on my chest, arms bound around my head.

To practice Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu technique, I moved my legs to one side, lifted my hips to shift her weight, shoved my forearm up against her throat, twisted an arm and wriggled out from underneath while still maintaining control.

I hate being pinned down. At least I now know how to get out.

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu is described as a martial art designed to allow the weaker to defeat the stronger. When I learned it mainly involves grappling, I had to give myself a mini-pep talk. I reminded myself that I have grappled before in martial arts classes. I could do it again.

But Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu takes grappling to an entirely different level. I spent half the class either putting my full weight on my partner, Morwenna Hardwick, or working on an escape when she pinned me down. The other half was spent in a headlock.

Many people arrive at the Gracie Barra Seattle studio new to grappling. Head instructor Rodrigo Lopes said being grabbed without reacting can be a challenge, and self-defense is one of many reasons to learn Jiu-Jitsu.

Another is the physical challenge. After outfitting me in a white gi, Lopes had us do a quick warm-up and demonstrated the first technique, a bear hug and headlock escape.

We practiced bracing our hands against our opponents' bellies to escape the bear hug, got pulled into a headlock, then set up our feet to collapse our opponents onto our legs, then slide them out so they fall to the ground and we escape. Finally, we let our hips collapse so they couldn't pull us over and pin us.

It is a complex series of moves that requires pretty much every muscle in your body. We did it so many times.

I figured out the bear-hug escape, but had trouble getting my feet set correctly so I could push on Morwenna's knee and have her sit on my leg. I also pulled her down often, rather than sliding my supporting leg away. I did manage to collapse my hips most of the time.

But that escape—and yes, even the headlock—felt like playtime compared to the side-mount escapes.

We started with our opponents on top, arms wrapped on either side of our heads. To get them off, we had to move our legs to one side, push our hips up and shove an elbow into their throats, keeping them up and away so we had time to slither out while still keeping control.

It took me a while to figure out how to escape, though I disliked being the opponent more; having an arm shoved into my throat wasn't pleasant.

We did another side-mount escape; this one became my favorite. We started with one arm wrapped around the person's shoulder. To get out, we had to move our legs and shove our hips up, grab our opponents' lapels and pull them up to get enough room to twist out. We also swiveled our legs in a twist to keep one hand on the lapel and get on top. I liked the complex twist required to execute this escape.

Did I mention I was disheveled, and also pulled out some of my partner's hair? Sorry, Morwenna.

We repeated each technique multiple times and then, for the final chunk of class, had to repeat all three over and over, as fast as we could go.

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu will get you accustomed to close quarters, fast. I was surprised that by the end, the contact felt normal, and was even fun. TS

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Stepping

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

ROSELYNMONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Vickie Izuka has been with the Northern Mariana Islands Football Association since its inception in early 2000s, witnessing the group's birth pains, helping out in its development, and celebrating its successes. »

Top photo, Vickie Izuka, standing third left, joins friends and other finishers at the photo booth of the 2018 Saipan Marathon. **Left photo**, Northern Mariana Islands Football Association vice president Vickie Izuka is all smiles after receiving the 2017 Administrator of the Year award during the Northern Marianas Sports Association banquet held last February at the Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan.

up to plate

Vickie Izuka, second left, joins sports and government officials in the groundbreaking ceremony for the NMI Soccer Training Center in Koblerville in 2016.

"I was at a school-related meeting with Jerry Tan back in 2004 and he asked those in attendance if they would be interested to help start a youth soccer program on Saipan. I had two young elementary-aged boys back then and thought it would be a great opportunity for them to participate in a team sport even though I had no knowledge of the sport. I also thought that starting a good youth cause from the ground up with a great group of creative thinkers, movers, and shakers would be very exciting and beneficial to our community. My children are actively involved so I wanted to give back and help nurture and grow the sport on Saipan," Izuka said when asked how she got involved in NMIFA.

As vice president, Izuka worked with other NMIFA officials in mapping out development plans for CNMI soccer and is specifically tasked at looking after the association's youth programs. The NMIFA's youth league, which holds competitions for two seasons (spring and fall) every year and a couple of side events, has been the steady source of talents for the Commonwealth's national teams that compete in regional and international tournaments.

She does her duties as the point person for NMIFA's youth league, while serving as MP United Football Club's president and working as vice president of First Hawaiian Bank. Her responsibilities are tough, but she survives with the help of the people around her and knowing that the work she does with the federation makes a difference in people's lives make her stay with the program.

"Sometimes, it's challenging to juggle all, including my role at the soccer club level too.

JON PEREZ

But under president Jerry Tan's leadership and with the help of our friends and supporters at AFC, EAFF, JFA, GFA and NMSA, the sport has grown tremendously over the past 13 years. NMIFA has provided so many unique opportunities for NMI citizens of various ages to travel and participate in many types of soccer-related activities and competitions and to have a broader view and outlook of the world," the MP United head said.

Love for sports

Though she had no knowledge of soccer before joining NMIFA, Izuka is no stranger to sports.

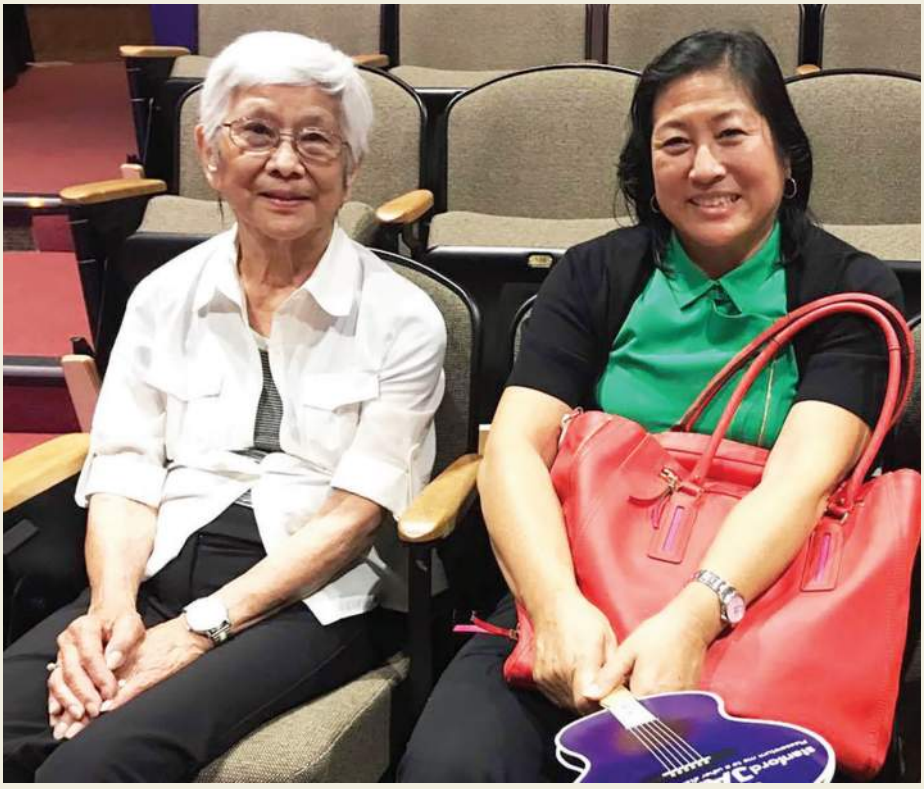
"Because my parents were active in sports, I was involved in many activities from elementary school. When I was in second grade I participated in baton twirling and performed in several parades. From age 9, I started playing in competitive girls basketball and continued until I graduated high school. During junior high I also added tennis and played competitively for a short time. Also during high school I had a short stint with karate," Izuka said.

On Saipan, she plays tennis and then finally tried soccer.

"It took me a while to sign up, but I've finally participated in the Dove Women's Masters League a few seasons and found it very fun and enjoyable. What would be next on my wish list would be a women's masters futsal and women's masters basketball," she said.

"It's great to be active, whether indoors or outdoors, to keep healthy, set and achieve goals, and enjoy the social aspects. I also believe that adding sports as an extra- »

> It's great to be active, whether indoors or outdoors, to keep healthy, set and achieve goals, and enjoy the social aspects.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Vickie Izuka proudly shows the 2017 Administrator of the Year award she won. **Top right photo**, Vickie Izuka spends time with her late mother Miyo Nakanishi during one of her visits in California.

curricular activity will actually help people with studies, if in school, and with the job, if working. It helps balance one's schedule, creates a healthier lifestyle, and serves as a good stress release," she added.

Tribute to mom

Izuka's contribution to CNMI soccer was recognized last February after she was named 2017 Sports Administrator of the Year during the Northern Marianas Sports Association awards banquet.

She shared the award with other people who worked and continues to work in the development of the sport in the CNMI, but solely dedicated the honor she received to her mom, Miyo Nakanishi (Izuka's mom died a few days after she responded to TAGA *Sports*' questions)

"There is no question in my mind that I would like to dedicate the award to my mother. She's been my role model and cheerleader as long as I can remember and she still is so supportive and proud of her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. From when I was very young, my mother was a key volunteer in the Japanese American community, helping with her faith-based organization while working and raising a family. Wherever my interests fell at any age, she was always right there, helping guide me and supporting me when needed," Izuka said.

"More than 30 years ago she and several of her friends started senior citizens activity and field trip groups and, although she is 80 years old today, she is still one of the active and very organized coordinators. Watching her give so much year after year gave me the desire to follow her footsteps in something I felt was helpful for the community I resided in. I am eternally grateful to this beautiful selfless woman," she added.

Women in sports

With Izuka and other female officials, coaches, and players stepping up to the plate to create one of the most successful sports programs in the CNMI, they proved that women can get the job done, too.

"The role of women in sports development is very important. It helps give young girls the mindset that they can have similar opportunities as boys to play sports and compete at the highest level domestically and internationally," Izuka said.

"My mother was instrumental in introducing this concept to me. She was a bowler competing in a co-ed league as I was growing up and she wanted me to pursue sports just the same as my brothers. She spent numerous hours driving me to my basketball games, sometimes traveling up to two hours a day. When I was playing tennis in junior high school, Billie Jean King beat Bobby Riggs. I recall thinking she was an inspiring leader in women's sports. She gave me hope and motivation that I too could do anything, and is just as good or better than my male counterparts," she added.

WE>1

ROSELYNMONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

The 670 Sonics XVIII's Bryan De Guzman, left, tries to power his way into the defense of M&M Salas Ol'Aces' Coby Santos during their title match in the 2017 TanHoldings Christmas Basketball Tournament at the Gillette Multipurpose Gymnasium.

670 SONICS
FIVE IDEALS OF FAIR PLAY

- Respect the rules
- Respect the officials and accept their decisions
- Respect your opponent
- Give everybody an equal chance to participate
- Maintain self control at all times

Emblazoned at the back of the every 670 Sonics jersey is "WE>1" instead of the usual player's family name.

The symbol stands for, "We are greater than one."

That is the not-so-secret secret to the 670 Sonics Basketball Club's success on and off the court.

"We are inclusive. We welcome all youth from all walks of life, and not exclusive, which is reflected in our team motto, 'We are greater than one.' It is teamwork that brings success in life beyond basketball," said Omar Ajoste, one of the head coaches of the 670 Sonics.

That means the team has players from San Vicente, Dandan, Garapan, Gualo Rai, Navy Hill, Capital Hill, As Terlaje, Susupe, Chalan Kanoa, Chalan Kiya, San Antonio, and Koblerville.

The club was founded in 2005 by Jesse Tudela, with most of its players coming from the south side of the island and enrolled at Saipan Southern High School. Then known as just the Sonics, they had only one team of 10 to 15 players; today they have five squads and 80 players in the pool.

The team name was chosen by Tudela and his players to reflect their style of play—run and gun. They play with speed as their primary skill set, in addition to height, talent, and basketball IQ.

According to Ajoste, the name "Sonics" fits the team's concept of playing fast, like the speed of a sound.

In its first year, the Sonics team won the Rotary Youth Basketball League's U18 title. For the next five years, Sonics team twice placed runner-up in the Rotary U18. The 2007 Sonics Team led by Manuel Ajoste, Jonathan Lim, and Jack Lizama also participated in the 2007 Micronesian Invitational Basketball Tournament 18U in Guam, stunning the Jericho Cruz-led CNMI Junior National Team and placing runner-up to Guam Junior National Team. The Sonics Basketball team also started to grow in 2009, fielding a U14 team that won in the Rotary and the main players from that team stuck together to win the U18 title in 2011.

Besides the Rotary league, the 670 Sonics are familiar fixtures in other competitions on island and field their youth teams in tournaments for adults. Just recently, the 670 Sonics sent two teams to »

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Coaches and players of the 670 Sonics pose for a group photo before their game in a youth league at the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium.

the Philippines to play in the 3rd Dreamers International Basketball Challenge.

In every game, whether they are losing or winning, the 670 Sonics do not rely on only a few players, as coaches almost always shuffle them and make sure to use all those who show up for the game. There is no such thing as a bench player for the club.

"We do our best to give our players an opportunity to play basketball. We want them to get more minutes playing in the youth league before they exit our program and join the adult leagues," said Ajoste, who shares coaching chores with Tudela, Adrian Flores, Zachariah Johnson, and Peter Mendiola.

Care for the environment

These days, coaches do not want their athletes to just focus on sports alone. Mentors also encourage players to be involved in activities that benefit the community.

"During our board meeting in 2016, our president, Francis Mendiola, suggested that we will take part in Marianas Visitors Authority's Beautify My Marianas Beach cleanup program every Saturday morning. We took that initiative and started in January 2017 until the present date," Ajoste said.

He recounted that, as of March 2018, the basketball club has collected over 4,000 lbs of trash in various beaches such as Kilili Beach, San Antonio Beach, Paupau Beach, Ladder Beach, and Obyan Beach.

He said the 670 Sonics basketball players were at first surprised and sad to see how much people litter and leave their trash behind "in the areas we were assigned to clean. However, they felt happy in the end that they were part of something positive in helping protect our beautiful beaches and coastal areas."

By participating in cleanup drives, the 670 Sonics also encourage their players to become good stewards of the environment and be more proactive in community outreach programs by helping build community gardens and do health and wellness activities.

Safe haven

Now on their 13th year, there's no slowing the 670 Sonics down, as they will continue to recruit players for their program.

They plan to compete in more tournaments here and off-island, hold training camps, and join community projects.

"We are here to provide our youth a safe haven through the game of basketball that is free of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco use, while also developing their character, teamwork, and leadership skills," Ajoste said.

NATIONAL prevention week 2018

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CNMI NPW national prevention week

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MAY 15 TINIAN — NPW ISA FOAM RUN & NPW ART CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCEMENT

MAY 16 SAIPAN — NPW ROADSIDE WAVING

MAY 17 SAIPAN — NPW ART CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCEMENT

MAY 18 ROTA — NPW ROADSIDE WAVING

MAY 19 ROTA — NPW ISA HEALTH WALK & NPW ART CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCEMENT

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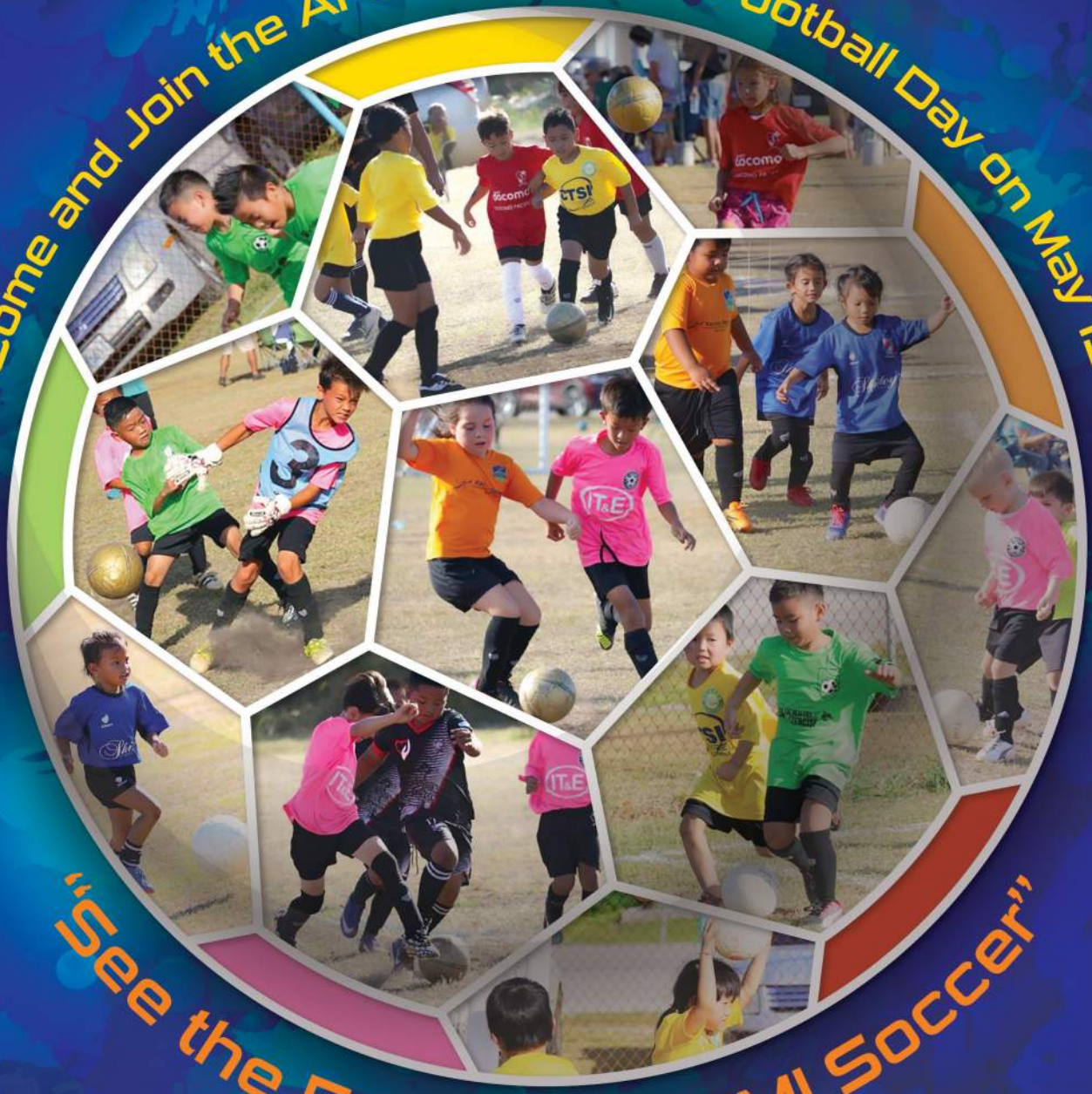
Come and Join the AFC Grassroots Football Day on May 19



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